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Expediter keep 'em moving from chock-in to take-off



FLIGHTLINE POINTMAN – Maintenance expeditor MSgt. Ron Sliwa monitors the progress of maintenance of C-5s during a 12-hour shift on the flightline in Bandit 7 helping to assure that aircraft are turned around to be fully mission capable in a timely and efficient manner.

—photo by
MSgt. Tom Allocco

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

Every hour, every day Raiders and Bandits prowl the flightline looking for trouble.

They're the four maintenance trucks, Red Raider 6 and 7 and Blue Bandit 6 and 7, with senior NCO expeditors behind the wheel, delivering maintenance specialists to airplanes, picking up spare parts and moving equipment. Most importantly, they're always looking for problems and bottlenecks, trying to resolve existing ones and avoid new ones.

The expeditors of the 439 Aircraft Maintenance Squadron don't fly the airplanes and they don't normally fix them. But the expeditors earn their pay by making all the connections so when a C-5 lands here, it will leave Westover ready to fly fully mission capable in a timely and efficient manner.

Life for an expeditor on the flightline is a 12-hour shift that can easily stretch into 13 hours or more. On a recent rainy day, MSgt. Ron Sliwa was the expeditor driving the Bandit 7 maintenance truck up and down the flightline, responsible for turning around five Galaxies. He's had as many as eight since the surge.

With a grip on his "brick" radio and his ear tilted to a second radio and a cell phone

in his truck, Sliwa was like someone at the center of a storm.

Working the radios, he requested a nitro pumper for North 3, asked Dispatch how much fuel they wanted for another plane, took instructions for 230,000 pounds of JP-8 for the C-5 and dropped off maintainers to do the fueling, dropped his radio next to him, grabbed his clip board stuffed with status notes on his five aircraft and proceeded back to the hydraulics shop to pick up parts for another crew to replace a hydraulic pump. It was early in the day. It looked like the rain would keep going all day and it looked to Sliwa like another long day on the flightline.

"You don't know what's going to happen from minute to minute," he said.

Outside the hydraulics shop a crew waited while he ran inside to check on parts. MSgt. Michael Conboy, an electrical specialist, eyed the cold rain and mused about the life of a maintainer.

"If you catch an outside job on a day like this it's not very pleasant. The first few hours you try not to get wet, the next few hours you're soaking wet and it doesn't matter anymore," he said.

Returning to the truck, the Bandit 7 expeditor drops off a crew chief for a home station check, a detailed inspection of an aircraft. "Go get 'em, Matt," he tells him. Over

his shoulder he swaps irreverent banter with the maintainers in the back of the truck. The give and take masks the seriousness of life on the flightline.

Sliwa knows that ultimately it is the 439th AMXS expeditor who will sign his name to the ER (exceptional release) which affirms that the maintainers have made the C-5 safe for flight before it is turned over to the aircrew.

The challenge starts when the maintainers taxi the plane into its parking spot. "It's pretty much a mystery when it's chocked in," Sliwa said.

A C-5 landing here after downrange missions typically has built up a number of small maintenance problems which degrades its mission capability. The maintainers have to find them and fix them to make the aircraft fully mission capable, said SMSgt. Joseph DiMartino, production supervisor.

Turning a plane around starts with a post flight inspection and a debriefing of the crew

(continued on next page)

An All-American welcome when Miss USA visits troops



Miss USA, Susie Castillo, accepts a 439th AMXS coin and squadron t-shirt from SSgt. Kara Davis during a visit to Westover on Monday. While here, Miss USA greeted Iraqi Freedom troops in the passenger terminal where she autographed photos.

—photo by MSgt. W.C. Pope

439th AW MISSION: Actively support national objectives on a global scale with ready, mobility forces

Expediter... (Cont. from page 1)

by the expediter. Not every plane can be turned around in a few hours. The expediter has to make the call on priorities and decide when crews have to be pulled off one plane for another job. Sometimes they have to say "no" to verifying the air worthiness of an aircraft.

"When they call for an ER I have to know the aircraft is ready," Sliwa said.

"On time take-off is a point of pride. But mission reliability is a bigger point of pride," DiMartino said.

"A plane might take off and get to its destination, but if it breaks on the first leg of the mission it doesn't do any good. We strive for the highest on-time take-off rate in AMC, but Westover also has a reputation throughout the system for mission reliability. We're lucky, we have a highly experienced, self-motivated group of people who pay attention to detail. They want to get the plane off the ground, they want the mission to succeed," DiMartino said.

The job gets done because Red Raiders and Blue Bandits prowl the flightline. "A plane takes off and they'll send another," Sliwa said. He didn't have long to wait for his next call from Job Control or a crew chief.

Pat Stats

Served since Feb. 2, 2003
4,301 passengers - 1,482 aircraft
15,046,308 pounds of cargo
Info from MSgt. Jim Garrity, 42APS

Meals

8,590 hot meals served
Box lunches: 4,488
Info from TSgt. David Beauregard, 439SVS

Fuel since Feb. 1

8,708,254 gallons of JP-8
Info from Jim Maloney, Fuels

PATRIOT

express

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Security guidelines prohibit using last names of deploying reservists.)

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F-15 Gorillas still making history

by MSgt. Tom Allocco

The "Gorillas" came home from Iraqi Freedom by way of the Westover Passenger Terminal last week.

Maintainers and several pilots of the 58th Fighter Squadron of Eglin AFB, Fla. who proudly wear the snarling, menacing gorilla on their unit patch experienced the "Westover Welcome." They arrived tired after two days on the road, including a stop-over in Rota, Spain. But the hamburgers and hotdogs were already grilling before they made their first calls home from American soil. Home-made carrot cake from USO helped say "welcome back."

Among those returning home were Capt. Joel Hemphill of Ohio. Call sign Deuce, he wore the Gorilla patch on his shoulder.

The gorilla nickname comes from the guerilla warfare-like tactics the 58th used in the Mediterranean Theater in World War II when they flew the P-40 Warhawk, P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning.

During the Vietnam War, flying F-4 Phantoms, the 58th Fighter Squadron lived up to the boast of their unofficial motto "Kill MiGs". The Gorillas proved their dogfighting skills, including shooting down a MiG-19 with a 300-round burst from a Vulcan cannon.

The aggressive 58th motto evolved into "Kill More MiGs" after the squadron claimed a MiG-29 as the first aerial kill of Desert Storm. The squadron's F-15 pilots destroyed 16 enemy aircraft, including 5 MiG-29s, and had the most air-to-air kills in Desert Storm.

The Gorillas made a different kind of history in the Iraqi Freedom air war.

"There were (Iraqi) airplanes. They just decided not to fly them. It's the first time in history a country at war decided not to use their airplanes. I guess it's quite a compliment to U.S. airpower," Hemphill said.



The 58th Fighter Squadron was in the AOR as air operations stepped up from Southern Watch to Iraqi Freedom.

The squadron flew sorties every day during 24-hour operations to protect high value assets that including AWACS, tanker, Rivet Joints and J-Stars missions and escorted all the strikers.

Ironically, although they were on the front lines of the war, they were too busy fighting it from a desert air base to closely observe it. "CNN had more coverage... people in the States had a better idea of what was going on," he said.

Life in the Iraqi Freedom AOR, "makes you appreciate a lot of things... running water, trees, grass.

"We're definitely proud to be part of it. We're thankful it was over quick. Mostly thankful to be home," the F-15 pilot said.

Air Guards' 187th AW brings back perfect score

A one hundred percent performance is the score SMSgt. Walter Markley give his Alabama Air National Guard airmen coming home from Iraqi Freedom. They were welcomed here Monday.

The maintainers and civil engineers from Montgomery, Ala. supported F-16 operations. "We didn't lose a single person or have a serious injury. And we never had a mission cancelled for maintenance. I call that a perfect mission," Markley said.

The Alabamans' civil engineers started the desert base from scratch in January, including setting up two power plants.

Markley estimates that the 410th AEW to which the guardsmen were attached flew at least 3,000 sorties. Their main mission was hunting Scud launchers. The 410th shared the desert base with a unit of Royal Air Force Harriers which flew Iraqi Freedom missions.

Express-ions

